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video

Wedding Pictures

Lesbians have always been part of the ceremony.

BY CANDACE MOORE

Films about lesbian weddings are still in short supply, but the lesbian's-eye view of straight weddings has made it onto celluloid in a handful of great films. These four videos offer an unconventional look at one of society's most normative rituals, which some people used to spend their lives preparing for—or avoiding.

Pandora's Box (*Die Büche der Pandora*)

(Janus Films, 1929)

Considered the first film to openly portray a lesbian, *Pandora's Box* features a breathtaking performance by Louise Brooks as Lulu, a cabaret artiste who seduces everything in her path without even trying. When Lulu and Countess Anna Geschwitz (Alice Roberts) dance at Lulu's wedding, brunette Brooks is aerodynamic in stark white bridal regalia while the strong-jawed Countess, sporting blonde marcelled waves, melts in a dark evening dress. When the groom interrupts, the Countess spits jealous venom. This is only one highlight in a long melodramatic epic dedicated to the premise that the female of the species is deadlier than the male. Banned or butchered on release, G.W. Pabst's silent has subsequently earned classic and cult status. Grade: **A**

The Member of the Wedding

(Columbia Pictures, 1952)

"She's got a crush on the wedding!" teases Bernice, the black woman who nurtures Frankie, a 12-year-old white tomboy in the throes of an identity crisis. What Frankie (the great Julie Harris) really has a crush on, besides the bride-to-be, is the normalcy her brother's wedding represents. Frankie suffers audibly from her otherness, constantly describing herself as an "unjoined person" and a "freak," and wailing, "I'd be better off in jail." Wise Bernice (the great Ethel Waters) knows the cause and cure of Frankie's calamity: "You've got to meet a nice girl." A very young Brandon de Wilde gives a knockout performance as Frankie's queer little sidekick. Known for making a poetic beeline to the emotional truth of her characters, Carson McCullers was the novelist equivalent of fellow Southerner Tennessee Williams, a close friend. This script, based on her book and play of the same name, tackles the formidable topics of socialization, race, and gender identity—without jargon. *The Member of the Wedding*, so upfront and politically progressive, is never less than a work of art. Grade: **A+**

First Comes Love

(Women Make Movies, 1991)

By weaving together documentary footage of four heterosexual marriages, Su Friedrich creates a

moving gay rights film. Underscored by pop love songs, the ceremonies flow together interchangeably. Guests gather, greet each other, and trudge into chapels. The 22-minute black-and-white film is a bittersweet mix, recording the ennui, distraction, excitement, and work of going through the traditional motions. Showcasing the mundane and blissful, pedestrian and personal, this activist film summons up the ghost of what's left out: two women or men being legally wed. Grade: **A**



OCTOBER FILMS

Celestial Ariadna Gil

Celestial Clockwork (*La Mécanique Céleste*)

(October Films, 1996)

Fina Torres, the director of this lush, enchanting Cinderella story, is in synch with the Jacques Lacan quotation in her film: "Fiction is the reality where anything is possible." *Celestial Clockwork* explores the imagination's power to inform the real. Impulsive Ana (Ariadna Gil) flees the altar in Venezuela and flies to Paris in her wedding dress, where she attempts to become an opera diva. Penniless, unknown, and without a long-term visa, she meets a host of loopy personalities who use travesty, voodoo, and divination to further her dream. She falls for kooky psychoanalyst Alcanie (Evelyne Didi), who is reciprocally smitten with the sumptuous, guileless Ana. Together they thwart a megalomaniacal performance artist (Arielle Dombasle) who shoots fire from her eyes and claims to be "in phase with modernity." In a happily married ending, Ana weds her psychic pal Armand, a fruity café garçon, so he won't get deported. Full of vibrant color and song, this offbeat, upbeat paean to *la vie de bohème* doubles as an argument for compassionate immigration laws. Grade: **A**

Candace Moore, coeditor of small press *Runcible Spoon*, lives in Berkeley.